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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000381

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NSC FORABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/2016
TAGS: [KDEM PHUM ASEC PREL LE DK](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: ASSISTING DENMARK AND OTHERS WEATHER
ATTACKS FROM CARTOONS OF PROPHET

REF: STATE 20453

Classified By: DCM Christopher W. Murray. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The building housing the Danish Consulate and the Austrian Embassy in Beirut was attacked during demonstrations on Sunday, February 5. At this time, Danish officials are operating out of the French Embassy in Beirut and the Austrian officials are being housed in the EU Commission delegation's headquarters. Danish and EU representatives have expressed their appreciation for informal U.S. offers of assistance, but have not given us any indication that they would take up such offers. Nearly all of Denmark's 400 nationals resident in Lebanon are remaining in the country. The Danish MFA representative sent to Beirut has also thanked us for the Ambassador's interventions with Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Prior to receipt of reftel, DCM met on February 7 with Soren Vohtz, Deputy Director of the Danish MFA's EU Coordination Office. Vohtz had arrived in Beirut on Saturday, February 4, after the Danes received word from the Lebanese security services that the demonstration planned for Sunday, February 5, would be targeting the Danish Consulate here. He remains in Beirut at least through this week, representing the Danish government, whose Consulate in Beirut has been staffed by locally engaged employees.

¶3. (C) Vohtz was primarily interested in the U.S. assessment of the political situation in Lebanon. We observed that the February 5 demonstration and subsequent burning of the building housing the Danish Consulate was far more an issue of internal Lebanese sectarian and political conflict than action targeted against Denmark for the publication of the caricatures. Vohtze replied that our analysis on this and other political trends tracked closely with what he had been hearing from other (presumably mostly EU) contacts.

¶4. (C) DCM conveyed our concerns about the Danish Consulate's situation here, noting that the Ambassador had contacted Lebanese PM Siniora on February 5 (the day of the demonstration) regarding the Vienna Convention and host country obligations to protect diplomatic premises. DCM also noted the informal offer of assistance to the Danish Mission here, transmitted from the Operations Center on the evening of February 5. Vohtz expressed his appreciation for both efforts. We informed Vohtz that the Ambassador had paid calls on the Greek Orthodox and Maronite bishops of Beirut; Vohtz seemed interested in this and implied that he may do the same. Vohtz commented that the Danish Ambassador, resident in Damascus, had paid calls on Sunni and Shia clerics during a visit to Beirut last week.

15. (C) Vohtz said that he had recently spoken with the owner of the building that housed the Danish Consulate. He said the owner had been friendly, which included a remark to him that, "this (the violence) did not happen because of Denmark." By contrast, the building's administrator has been difficult to deal with.

16. (C) Vohtz commented that physically, the premises of the Danish Consulate were unharmed, but that smoke damage made the offices completely unusable at this time. All papers had been protected in safes and were intact. He said that it was some "low-tech" security precautions that had saved the Consulate from being entered. Among these were fire doors \QVGp9%jstration, that stopped people who had tried to break in through these windows. In addition, the building elevator was set not to stop at the floor of the Consulate's offices.

17. (C) Vohtz said the Austrians, whose Embassy is located in the same building, had requested from the Lebanese authorities additional security for the February 5 demonstration, but that the extra security had obviously not been sufficient. DCM spoke with Austrian Ambassador Georg Mautner on February 8. Mautner confirmed that when he learned of the demonstration on February 7 (the Danes, Dutch, and perhaps others had been alerted two days earlier), he asked for added security around the ten story building that houses his Embassy, the Danes, and commercial offices. Mautner said that his concerns were not taken seriously by the Lebanese security services, who could have done far more to monitor access of people and vehicles, and inspect, for example, the many buses that were streaming into Beirut from

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north Lebanon. Mautner said that the Austrian Embassy, on the eighth floor of the building (the Danes are on the fourth floor) was not penetrated. Strong doors and reinforced glass had stopped those who had tried to enter the Austrian Embassy. Once smoke from the fires set by Molotov cocktails had spread through the building, he said, those trying to enter gave up their efforts. He said the entire interior of the building is badly damaged, and the only means in and out of the Austrian Embassy is via the exterior fire escape stairs. These stairs, he said, are too narrow to move furniture or other sizable items. He did not expect the building to be ready for re-occupancy for at least a year. For now, the Austrians are operating out of the EU Commission Delegation's offices, but Mautner indicated that situation could not continue indefinitely.

18. (C) Vohtz said that the Danes will file a formal protest with both the Syrian and Lebanese authorities, which will include a request for compensation. He said the tone of the Syrian complaint will be tougher than the Lebanese complaint, given that, "the Syrians in Damascus did nothing to protect the Embassy."

19. (SBU) Finally, Vohtz commented that the Danish MFA has full confidence in the Danish national resident in Beirut who serves as the Danish Consul, Birgitta Harb. He said that very few Danes have chosen to evacuate Lebanon, as most of them seem to be deeply embedded into the local community.

FELTMAN